

Cruising with the Duxbury police

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A day in the life of a Duxbury police officer isn't all its cracked up to be – it's more. Sometimes it's more stimulating. At other times, it's more soporific.

But certain things for patrolman Thomas Johnson are a given. Arriving at the station, with a few minutes to spare before his shift begins, he says his hellos to the two officers in dispatch, and quickly changes into his uniform. After a brief e-mail check, to make sure there's nothing already waiting on his plate, he stops in to chat with Chief Mark DeLuca and the two quickly check on some paperwork.

Soon, Johnson is down the hall and out the back door to the garage toward a cruiser, one of the town's set of triplets. He passes a police motorcycle and points.

"This is what I normally ride," he says. "It's beautiful out. I'll definitely have to take her out this afternoon, if it doesn't rain."

On such a bike Johnson has ridden alongside The Patriots and the Red Sox, helping out when the Boston police department is in need of additional units.

"It's incredible," he says. "I rode right beside Tom Brady."

He continues walking through the garage to the cruiser and puts his bag of personal affects in the bare backseat of hard plastic – no amenities, not even cushions, for those who ride in back – and secures them in place with the seatbelt.

Johnson then checks the portable defibrillator, one of five the town obtained through grants, and places that in the backseat as well. He gets in the driver's seat, buckles his seatbelt, and starts the car. Or tries to, but the car is obstinate.

"It's dead again," he says calmly. "Even when the engine is on, the battery's been draining. Mechanic's been trying to fix it, but it keeps happening."

Apparently accustomed to this by now, he quickly hops back out of the car, without giving it a second try, and removes his bag and defibrillator. Johnson moves directly to another cruiser sitting in the park-

ing lot, and begins the same procedure.

Items are fastened in place, and so is he, when he starts the car again. This time, it is without event. He settles in, adjusting the equipment between his own side and the passenger seat: radio and radar, among others.

Now, cruiser 171 begins its route from Route 3A down toward the water. As he drives along, he takes note of some of the more impressive houses.

"It's an incredible town," Johnson says. "All of these people obviously do something well."

He turns the radar on, checking the speeds of cars in front of him, as well as those passing behind him. The radar also shows him his own speed for comparison.

"You can also clock people, and try to parity their speed with your own," Johnson says. "How long you clock them – a quarter of a mile, half a mile – depends on how fast they are going. You need to be able to prove the parity."

As he continues down the road, other drivers honk and wave to him.

"Hey, Tom," screams one woman, driving past him in her own car. "When you comin' by?"

"Hey," he yells back, straining his neck as she drives past. "Maybe I'll drop by tonight after my shift."

"My buddy's wife," Johnson mutters.

He continues down to the water, and stops in to say hello to harbor-master Don Beers. Beers has his head buried in the engine of a truck as his dog wanders around. He doesn't see Johnson.

"Hey, Mr. Mechanic, have you seen Don Beers?" he jokes.

Beers comes to the driver's side window and greets Johnson with a

big smile. They catch up a bit, and then Beers teases him about his newly elected position on the board of assessors, which voted him vice chairman just days before.

"You know, I told you, Tom, if you just cut my taxes in half..." Beers trails off, and the two laugh.

Back out on the road, he takes another look at some of the houses.

"It's incredible how they get ripped off," Johnson said. "People go in there in broad daylight. Sometimes they even tell the neighbors that they are appraisers

and just walk right in."

Soon a call comes in over the radio from the dispatcher: A dispute at a home on Tremont Street.

It takes Johnson a moment, but he remembers the address and realizes what the problem is. A

deceased man's girlfriend and children are arguing; the children say she doesn't have a right to be in her late boyfriend's home.

"They were just renting, so it's not the family's property," Johnson said. "There's nothing I can do."

But he radios back, and tells the dispatcher that he can stop in and explain the situation to both parties, if needed.

Riding down the road to Tremont, Johnson pulls into the driveway, but finds no other vehicles on the premises, aside from a boat.

He gets out of the car, and knocks the blue door of the small yellow house, just to be sure. A few moments later, he returns to the car. No answer.

Johnson radios back to the dispatcher to let him know.

"I can try stopping by again later," he said.

In the meantime, he asks permission to leave the vicinity for a few moments, and heads over the

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Kingston line to grab some cash at an ATM and buy a cup of coffee at a parking-lot kiosk.

He lets the dispatcher know afterward that he's returned to the Duxbury side, and waves to a kid walking on the side of the street.

"My son's buddy," he said.

"Great kid. His father's a state trooper."

Driving along, Johnson sees a truck in the middle of the road at Perry Drive. He stops to see what the problem is.

"There was just a puff of smoke and then I lost steering," the woman said. "I think the engine exploded."

Johnson lines up his own car with hers and asks her to get in the driver's seat and steer. He pushes it further back to the side of the road, getting it out of the intersection.

Continuing down the road, he soon receives the second call of the day. There's been a robbery. The gentleman who owns the

house is standing in his driveway, out near the road, waving Johnson in.

He and his wife were out for the day, and when he returned home, alone, he found certain areas trashed and items missing.

Johnson instructed him to stay downstairs while he took a look upstairs, making sure the perpetrator was no longer on the premises.

He opened the front door with his jacket sleeve, careful not to leave fingerprints.

Detectives were called, and just a few minutes later, Johnson and the detective continued questioning the man: What time did he leave? What time did he return? Had anyone been working on the house lately?

Then they went through the house, checking which rooms were hit and which weren't. Johnson told the owner he'd need to make a list of missing items.

Upon entering a spare bedroom, Johnson noticed that the room was immaculate. The only notice-

able disturbance was on the carpet. Footprints were made, leading from the doorway to the closet.

"Could these have been made by your wife before she left?" Johnson asked.

"No," the detective said. "Those were made by larger boots."

They continued through the house, landing in the basement, where the owner's son lives. With drawers broken off his desk and cups and vases smashed atop a dollar bill, many items were noticeably present: televisions, VCRs, stereos.

They asked the owner to take a look at the checkbook left on the desk.

"A lot of them will take checks from the middle, so check the sequence," Johnson said.

Johnson then returned to the station, to grab some paperwork and head back to the scene for his second shift of the day.